



TAKOMA/LANGLEY CROSSROADS DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY, INC.

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June 12, 2009

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The Honorable Bruce Williams
Mayor, City of Takoma Park
7500 Maple Avenue
Takoma Park, MD 20912

RE: Prince George's County - Takoma/Langley Crossroads Draft Sector Plan

Dear Mayor Williams:

The Takoma/Langley Crossroads Development Authority ("CDA") represents the 154 businesses in the Takoma Park portion of the Takoma/Langley Crossroads. The CDA has been working with the Prince George's and Montgomery County Planning Staffs and the City of Takoma Park Planning Staff in the development of both new Sector Plans for the area. The CDA has attended public planning sessions held by planning staffs of both counties and also met with City and County planners over the past year.

The CDA has long been a supporter of the Purple Line, the stated reason both of these Sector Plans are being proposed. Therefore, one of the key goals of the Sector Plans is to support the logistics and purpose of the Purple Line. However, given the contents of the Staff Draft Sector Plans, it is far from clear to the CDA that is the case, as described below. Apart from the Purple Line our primary consideration is to maintain and promote the existing businesses in the Crossroads. Without coordination between the Counties, SHA and MTA, we are convinced that the Sector Plans could significantly compromise the business prospects, and even the survival, of our members.

We request that the City of Takoma Park's resolution, testimony, and correspondence to Prince George's County to take note of the following issues. We will be testifying directly to the Prince George's County Planning on these points and others.

"First, do no harm." The Prince George's Draft Sector Plan should expressly recommend that existing structures, site improvements and land uses are to be deemed "conforming" and allowed to be modified/repared/ rebuilt and expanded up to 25% of existing gross square footage (subject to existing zoning requirements) without triggering any new zoning standards, dedications, or public improvements. Our member businesses and properties are working

2. The Purple Line is key. We support the recommendation that implementation of the plan should be triggered by the full funding and start of construction of the Purple Line in the Sector Plan area. If this is delayed or cancelled, then existing zoning and plan conditions should remain in effect.
3. The transportation network must continue to serve existing shopping and office centers and businesses. A better, and less impactful, solution than the proposed “jug handles” can and must be found. The Prince George’s Draft Sector Plan proposes elimination of left turns at the main University Boulevard and New Hampshire Avenue intersection, with these turning movements to be accomplished by “jug handles.” We believe that such radical changes to access patterns (changes that will be made in a piecemeal fashion by individual property owners), will all but eliminate convenient access to the existing businesses, therefore severely harming the viability of those businesses
4. Some provision for convenience surface parking should be retained. The Prince George’s Draft Sector Plan calls for parking to be placed in structures or behind buildings, but makes no provision for convenience parking for retail customers. This will put retail businesses in this suburban location at a severe competitive disadvantage with other areas. While the Draft Sector Plan calls for on-street parking during non-rush hours, we believe it is highly unlikely that SHA will allow that on State roads, which account for most of the street frontage. Thus there will not even be metered street parking to support retail activities. Other successful new urbanism areas have allowed some convenience retail parking adjacent to storefronts to support the retail uses the plan desires.
5. Public parking provisions should be more clearly defined. The Prince George’s Draft Sector Plan calls for exploration of public parking via a parking district, publicly-funded garages, or other mechanism. This is especially important as the coming of the Purple Line is likely to attract additional demand for parking by commuters wishing to use the new transit facilities. The multi-jurisdictional aspect of the Takoma/Langley Crossroads area will present special challenges to the use of public funding for parking.
6. We support the recommendation for multi-jurisdictional entities to coordinate activities and improvements. The CDA has long been a proponent of multi-jurisdictional cooperation in the Crossroads. Without such entities to maintain ongoing coordination, the vision articulated by the Prince George’s Draft Sector Plan will not be realized. The City of Takoma Park should insist on a formalized multi-jurisdictional coordinating body, much like the Commission on Crossroads Development established by Governor Glendenning, but which was allowed to languish by subsequent administrations.

7. The Zone must be clearly articulated. We understand the Planning Staff cannot recommend a zone in the Plan if it has not yet been adopted. However, a discussion of how the zone will operate and what its provisions will be is essential to making sense of the Plan. Specifically, the CDA is concerned that existing businesses will be compromised if the “deemed conforming” language proposed in Paragraph 1 is not codified. In addition, without understanding the specific characteristics of the new zone, existing businesses and property owners will not have any idea if interim or permanent expansions will be possible in the future. As the Plan notes, the Crossroads is a thriving commercial area and the CDA is committing to maintaining that vitality.

We look forward to continuing our participation with the City of Takoma Park, the Sector Plan staffs from both Counties, and with the Purple Line planning staff in this critical effort.

Respectfully submitted,

Takoma/Langley Crossroads Development Authority



G. Neel Teague, President



Erwin H. Mack, Executive
Director

***Takoma/Langley Xroads Commercial Property Owners
c/o Takoma/Langley Crossroads Development Authority
7676 New Hampshire Avenue, Suite 101, MB142
Takoma Park, Maryland 20912***

June 12, 2009

The Honorable Bruce Williams
Mayor, City of Takoma Park
7500 Maple Avenue
Takoma Park, MD 20912

RE: Prince George's County - Takoma/Langley Crossroads Draft Sector Plan

Dear Mayor Williams:

The commercial property owners in Takoma/Langley Park Crossroads area have formed a working group called the Takoma/Langley XRoads Commercial Property Owners ("Xroads") to coordinate review and respond to the two Crossroads Sector Plans being developed by Prince George's County and Montgomery County. The Xroads group consists of some 16 commercial property owners, including the owners of the retail centers at all four quadrants of the intersection of University Blvd. and New Hampshire Ave. as well as at University Blvd. and Riggs Road.

The Xroads group has been working with the Planning Staffs of Prince George's and Montgomery Counties and the City of Takoma Park in the development of both new Sector Plans. The Xroads group has attended public planning sessions held by planning staffs of both counties and also met as a group and individually with planners over the past year.

The Xroads has long been a supporter of the Purple Line, the stated reason both of these Sector Plans are being proposed. Therefore, one of the key goals of the Sector Plans is to support the logistics and purpose of the Purple Line. However, given the contents of the Staff Draft Sector Plans, it is far from clear to the Xroads that is the case, as described below. Apart from the Purple Line our primary consideration is to maintain and promote the existing properties and businesses in the Crossroads. Without coordination between the Counties, SHA and MTA, we fear the Sector Plans could significantly compromise the integrity of these businesses.

We request that the City of Takoma Park's resolution, testimony, and correspondence to Prince George's County to take note of the following issues. We will be testifying directly to the Prince George's County Planning on these points and others.

1. The Prince George's Draft Sector Plan should coordinate its recommendations with the Purple Line to ensure that it is not filled with unattainable requirements that impede future redevelopment. In our recent meeting with Maryland Transit Administration we learned that the Purple Line is being designed to address current road configurations and is not being designed to accommodate possible future changes in road alignments and circulation patterns included in the Prince George's Draft Sector Plan. It will be difficult if not impossible, even in the long term, to change the station and track configurations once in place.

2. “Jug handles” are not a viable solution to improve traffic circulation, and will severely harm the redevelopment potential of parcels impacted by additional right-of-way dedication requirements. Alternatives should be developed to achieve an acceptable level of service to support the densities called for in the Plan using existing road alignments with changes to signal timing, lane configuration, and factoring in projected substantial increases in transit utilization. The Prince George’s Draft Sector Plan calls for “jug handles” to eliminate left turn movements and the University Boulevard/New Hampshire intersections. In a recent meeting with State Highway Administration we learned that detailed transportation planning studies necessary to evaluate the feasibility and cost-effectiveness of proposed “jug-handles” and to consider other alternatives, have not been done. Therefore, the recommendations in both County Draft Plans regarding circulation, new rights-of-way, and right-of-way widths, are entirely premature. At this point, SHA does not know if jug handles would improve or impede levels of service in the Crossroads area as a whole, nor how such changes could be implemented in phases as redevelopment occurs without severe disruption to existing properties that are not yet ready for redevelopment.

Moreover, the "jug handles" are the wrong tool for the wrong environment. They will likely only serve to expand the congestion problems localized at the intersection of University and New Hampshire to surrounding properties, roads and intersections by redirecting formerly "left turn" traffic through a circuitous route, disrupting secondary traffic routes and intersections and sending the same traffic through the intersection twice. This concept is ill-suited to an at-grade intersection in an urban environment.

3. We support the principle of additional road connectivity in a way that truly distributes traffic impacts. We support the Prince George’s Draft Sector Plan recommendations for more connectivity into adjacent residential communities, such as bringing 15th Avenue north to connect to the end of Holton Lane, and providing alternate routes connecting University Boulevard and New Hampshire Avenue (e.g., Kanawha extension to the east of Riggs Road.) We do not feel that the one block interior streets shown in the large parcels immediately adjacent to the main intersection will accomplish connectivity, just grid lock.
4. The densities, heights, and coverage requirements called for in the Prince George’s Draft Sector Plan in the transit-proximate area should be equivalent to those called for in the Montgomery County Draft Sector Plan. Currently, the Prince George’s Draft Sector Plan calls for densities to be calculated on net land area, whereas the draft Plan for Montgomery County utilizes gross land area. In some cases this could result in as much as a 30% reduction in total density. If the Crossroads area is to achieve a coherent vision and take full advantage of the public investment in transit, the both sides of the county line should be compatible in scale and density.

5. The zoning tool used to implement the Sector Plan must be developed and adopted simultaneously with the Sector Plan. The Prince George's Draft Sector Plan does not propose a zoning category to implement the plan. Without some understanding as to how development will actually be regulated, the provisions of the Plan could result in no investment in existing or new improvements. Whatever the zoning tool, it should provide for the existing improvements and uses to be deemed conforming and allowed to be maintained and increased by up to 25% without triggering new development standards, dedications, parking requirements and other recommendations of the Plan.

We look forward to continuing our participation with the City of Takoma Park, with Sector Plan staffs from both Counties, and with the Purple Line planning staff in this critical effort.

Respectfully submitted,



Takoma/Langley Xroads
Commercial Property Owners

G. Neel Teague, Chair